

Leisa Gibbons wrote me the following request:

“My name is Leisa Gibbons and I am conducting a research project with Sue McKemmish, Professor and Director of the [Centre for Organisational and Social Informatics](#) in the Caulfield School of IT towards a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree at Monash University. My research interest is on personal recordkeeping and shared, public culture in social media communities, with a particular focus on Youtube. There is very little research about this phenomenon from an archival/records perspective.

One of my methods of data collection is to conduct semi-structured interviews with experts who have knowledge on Youtube, its impact, and/or cinema, media or information-related fields. The topics of discussion for these interviews focus on record keeping, or what might be called memory-making, by individuals within an online community using social media. It is anticipated that each expert will bring contexts related to their field of study and interest in Youtube. I will be analysing the interviews using Grounded Theory techniques in order to develop an understanding about cultural formation processes. My goal is to understand the multiple ways of understanding and defining Youtube – by users, creators and scholars.”

LG: The first topic I want to talk about with you is how to understand Youtube. Youtube is... ? Some of the kinds of questions that might be asked are how you understand Youtube? What framework(s) do you situate your understanding of Youtube? What is important to know about Youtube? How would you explain Youtube to someone who had no idea of what it was?

GL: The main reason of Youtube's is the 'invention' of the in-browser video display. Before 2005 a video had to be watched through a special program in a separate window such as Quicktime, Real Player, VLC, Windows Media Player and so on. The Youtube experience has made it so much easier to watch video clips without having to leave your browser. This jump in usability can only be understood properly if we add the ADSL broadband element to it. What made the online video so painstakingly slow was the fact that all these data had to go through a 56K dial-up connection. This gradually changed in 2001-2003, even though some users had a faster connection before that, for instance through ISDN.

LG: How can we understand Youtube as a record? This topic has been framed using the word, 'culture' perspective; a concept that also embraces the many 'views' and forms of Youtube: technology, information systems,

social informatics, media, moving image... Some of the questions that might be asked are what elements or parts of Youtube are records of culture? What cultural records do you think are important to keep in order to understand Youtube? What about Youtube would be good to remember? Who needs to remember? What role does the Youtube user have as creator of cultural heritage materials, if any? In an electronic system, what contains the evidence of Youtube? Whose memory or heritage might it be?

GL: YouTube is a closed, corporate environment. So there is nothing open about it. Needless to say it is not a public infrastructure or facility. It is a fluid database of millions of computer files, made possible because of new data storage technologies that cause dramatic and ongoing drop in price of data storage per megabyte. Google might pull the plug over. This has happened before in the history of the internet, and media in general. Not a trace of YouTube could be left in the near future, apart of images stored in other formats such as print or on video tapes (which themselves need to taken care of). What would be best to remember of YouTube is perhaps statistics, the sheer amount of views of certain clips, the long tail, the comments. YouTube is a distribution channel and in that sense the storage of the individuals clips needs to happen elsewhere.

LG: The third topic I want to raise is about the individual (and personal) in media systems and social media technology. Some of the questions to consider are the relationship Youtube has with other social media, such as MySpace, Facebook & Flickr, as well as social bookmarking tools such as Delicious, Digg and reddit and collaborative spaces such as Wikipedia? Plus, how Youtube fits into the broader technology system - such as the internet and how does the individual fit into this? What does this technology do for people? Who are the people that use this technology? What relationships does this technology have with other technologies?

GL: You ask a lot of questions. In general the services you list here are brought together under the Web 2.0 label. Whether that is correct and will be correct in the near future remains to be seen. What they roughly have in common is that move away from content and instead focus on 'the social'. The so-called user-generated content itself is irrelevant. What is exploited for commercial purposes are the profiles, the social relations that people are willing to make public such as I like this, I also buy that, I prefer that as well, I know these people, I like swimming but also dining etc. The individual feels reinstated by the authority that asks all these questions. In that sense

subjectivation and mass experience are not explicit contradictions, at least not for the moment. However, this can change overnight. The growth of Facebook has been fast, and so can be its decline. YouTube, and other online video services like Vimeo, really thrive from the fact that they are embedded in blogs, websites, linked to in tweets and 'liked' on Facebook. There must be figures how many users actually go to YouTube itself to watch videos. I bet it is considerable (as everything is in this branch) but it is my guess that people browse less these days and rather watch these short clips in between other activities.

LG: Could you speculate about Youtube, social media and its place in history? Can you reflect on the role of cultural and media research, and potentially other fields of research that are happening now about Youtube and social media. Some relevant questions might be around what the role and future of social media is and Youtube's place in it? How does research contribute to the legitimization of this kind of technology (social media)?

GL: As bandwidth through fibre optics spreads so will the average attitude towards the 'short video clips' sites. Officials at Google and YouTube are well aware of this. It is no secret that with the arrival of full screen quality online television that streams live there will be less demand for the low quality so-called funny online content a la YouTube. This will be the revenge of the 'old media' if you like. Remember, YouTube is a product of its time: of ADSL and cable access. YouTube is now preparing for this shift in behavior by creating more professional channels. It is obvious that their official are already bored and fed up with the user generated content. There is no money in that stuff-and everyone knows this. So what we will see is a professionalization of online video, across the board. I am not quite sure if research is playing any role in these developments. I very much doubt it. It is enough for the officials to just visit the technology-broadcasting-consumer electronics fairs and couple that with their own data. They do not need humanities scholars for that (maybe hardcore social scientists, yes...). If online video is going to be connected-and steered-by social networking sites is something that is undecided. I doubt that the interlinking of services will last. What might remain is the very principle of recommendation. 'Liking' is the dream come true for marketeers. Imagine that you no longer have to 'seduce' to hand out their preferences. They now do this all by themselves!